VZCZCXRO3027
PP RUEHGR
DE RUEHPO #0164 0761358
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 171358Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8165
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 0988
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 1583
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0142
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 1989
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEBAAA/USDOE WASHDC

UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000164

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR: LLUFTIG, WHA/EPSC, IO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PBTS PGOV PHSA PREL KTIA ECON EPET ENRG NS
SUBJECT: SURINAME CONSIDERS EXPANDING ITS MARITIME BORDER (ECONOMIC ZONE)

REF: 05 PARAMARIBO 704

¶1. Suriname's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lygia Kraag Keteldijk, announced on March 10, that Suriname would exercise its option to increase the country's maritime border (northern Atlantic seacoast) an additional 150 nautical miles under the auspices of the United Nation's Convention on the Law of the Sea. Suriname presently claims a maritime border of 200 nautical miles and, per the treaty, signatories have until 2009 to exercise their option to extend the coastal border to the legal limit of 350 nautical miles.

¶2. Suriname has assigned the task of preparing the UN petition to its Border Commission, headed by Surinamese attorney Mr. Hans Lim A Po. The commission will also be assisted by Alex OudeElferink of the Dutch Institute for the Law of the Sea, and Eddy Jharap, former General Manager of the state-owned oil company, Staatsolie. OudeElferink and Lim A Po are also members of the Surinamese Arbitration Commission responsible for arguing the Suriname-Guyana border dispute currently before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Suriname expects to spend 1.5 million USD over the next three years on preparing its claim for the extended zone. The financing for this project will come from Staatsolie.

¶3. Border Commission chair Lim A Po told the press that in the most realistic assessment, Suriname would be eligible to claim an additional 50 to 60 nautical miles. In supporting its claim, Suriname will need to need to consider three important factors:
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-- possible competing claims with its eastern neighbor, French Guiana. Even though both France and Suriname do not currently have agreement on the precise dimensions of the shared 200 nautical mile coastal shelf, both countries have shown a willingness to cooperate on mapping the course of the shared border and are willing to present their petition to the UN jointly.
-- a more vexing problem that may arise from its western neighbor, Guyana. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas is expected to hand down its ruling in the long-standing maritime border dispute in early 2007. The court would need to settle the current dispute with Guyana in time for Suriname to meet the 2009 deadline.
-- potential problems with Barbados, which is also preparing a claim to expand its economic zone. The expansion of an additional 150 nautical miles due north may result in overlapping claims.

¶4. Suriname's motivation to expand its economic zone is being partially driven by the recent increase in oil exploration off its coast (see Reftel). Both Suriname and bordering countries will have interests in clearly defined territorial demarcation as Suriname begins to grant drilling rights in potentially lucrative offshore oil fields.

BARNES